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# Superbold, superlong shot

Owner of hurricane-ravaged Hyatt Regency New Orleans faces fight on grand plans for rebuilding hotel and surrounding area

By Kathy Bergen

Tribune staff reporter

**N**EW ORLEANS—The northern wall of the smoked-glass Hyatt Regency New Orleans resembles a giant checkerboard gone awry, with sheets of white plastic covering windows blown out in some 600 rooms by Hurricane Katrina.

Inside the 27-story tower, the sweeping escalators stand still, with glass shards from shattered atrium windows embedded in their works.

A hanging brass sculpture in the sky-high atrium, designed to represent geese in flight, was buffeted by winds. Now the geese at the upper reaches are hanging at odd angles, like so many birds with broken wings.

The hotel, which needs an estimated \$100 million in repairs and will be closed until mid-2007, is surrounded by other damaged and shuttered properties. Among them: the Louisiana Superdome, home to the NFL's New Orleans Saints; the New Orleans Arena, where the New Orleans Hornets play; and the New Orleans Centre, a shopping mall anchored by Macy's.

Layer this physical pileup atop uncertainty about the city's future population level, business base, housing stock, educational system and flood-protection apparatus, and you've got one very big question mark.

Can a 1,184-room business hotel in this office corridor, which stands apart from such tourist



Photo for the Tribune by Chris Graythen

Laurence Geller, chief of Strategic Hotels & Resorts, owner of the Hyatt Regency New Orleans, wants the entire Superdome neighborhood rejuvenated.

PLEASE SEE HOTEL, PAGE 4



